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Advancing the Army Professional Military Ethic

By GEORGE W. CASEY, JR.

Today, our Army faces two broad challenges: restoring balance to a force stretched and strained by almost 8 years of war, and adapting to the anticipated demands of 21st-century conflict. Repeated deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq have placed enormous burdens on leaders and Soldiers. In the near future, the strains stemming from the frequency and complexity of such operations will likely remain. We expect the coming decades to be characterized by persistent conflict—protracted confrontation among state, nonstate, and individual actors increasingly willing to use violence to achieve political and ideological ends. The realities of this era will continue to test our leaders as they operate among the people in complex environments. Here, moral-ethical failures, even at the lowest levels, have strategic implications.

As the character of conflict in the 21st century evolves, the Army's strength will con-

tinue to rest on our values and our ethos. The actions of our leaders, especially our junior leaders, must remain true to those values. Success may hinge on decisions they make in ambiguous, time-sensitive situations. At the very least, their collective actions will go far toward shaping the outcome of operations. Some indicators suggest that we have more work to do. For example, a 2006 Army study found that 40 percent of Soldiers surveyed would not report a comrade for committing a potential war crime.

Most of our Soldiers do the right thing time and again under intense pressure, but we must maintain our high ethical standards—a key source of our Army's strength—throughout this era of persistent conflict. In October 2007, we chartered the Army Center of Excellence for the Professional Military Ethic (ACPME) to ensure that our core values and ethos remain strong in the face of repeated deployments and the challenges of modern,

complex battlefields. This past spring, ACPME assumed formal responsibilities for the full scope of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities as they affect the professional military ethic and character development for the Army at large. I selected the United States Military Academy at West Point as the Center of Excellence because it has served as the wellspring of professional Soldier values for more than 200 years. Today, over 80 percent of the faculty at West Point has combat experience. Instructors can draw on this experience as they educate leaders of character who will be able to meet the challenges of a complex operational environment. More broadly, ACPME will make an Army-wide contribution as it explores the moral and ethical foundations of the profession of arms.

Our professional military ethic is the system of moral standards and principles that define our commitment to the Nation and the way we conduct ourselves in its service. In part, we articulate the professional military ethic through Army values, the Warrior Ethos, the noncommissioned officer's creed, the Soldier's creed, and oaths of office. Yet the full meaning of the professional military ethic extends beyond these beliefs and norms. More implicit aspects of our rich history and culture influence our moral compasses as well. ACPME will assist our leaders and institutions in articulating this ethic and in sustaining the future moral-ethical health of America's Army.

This initiative is an Army-wide effort reaching across commands, the Army schools system, and the operating force to capture existing expertise and promulgate professional military ethic resources for our Army.

General George W. Casey, Jr., is the 36th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.



Deputy commanding general of Multinational Division–Baghdad addresses media after ceremony transferring Sha'ab Central Market to Iraqi control, January 2009

In partnership with other Army organizations, ACPME will provide a number of tangible benefits to the Service: curriculum and courseware for formal training on the professional military ethic; publications and scholarly research on topics pertinent to Army values and the warrior ethos; junior leader developmental products; train-the-trainer courses and leader training; and outreach through a number of conferences, seminars, and forums.

I have charged ACPME with three main missions. The first is to assess, study, and help refine the professional military ethic of the Army. Outside of some surveys, much of what we understand about the current professional military ethic is anecdotal or not well articulated. It is also vitally important that we take care to understand the ethical issues our Soldiers face so we can tailor programs appropriate to their needs. With this goal in mind, ACPME has been gathering data over recent months from a variety of sources and soon will conduct a survey of forces in Iraq.

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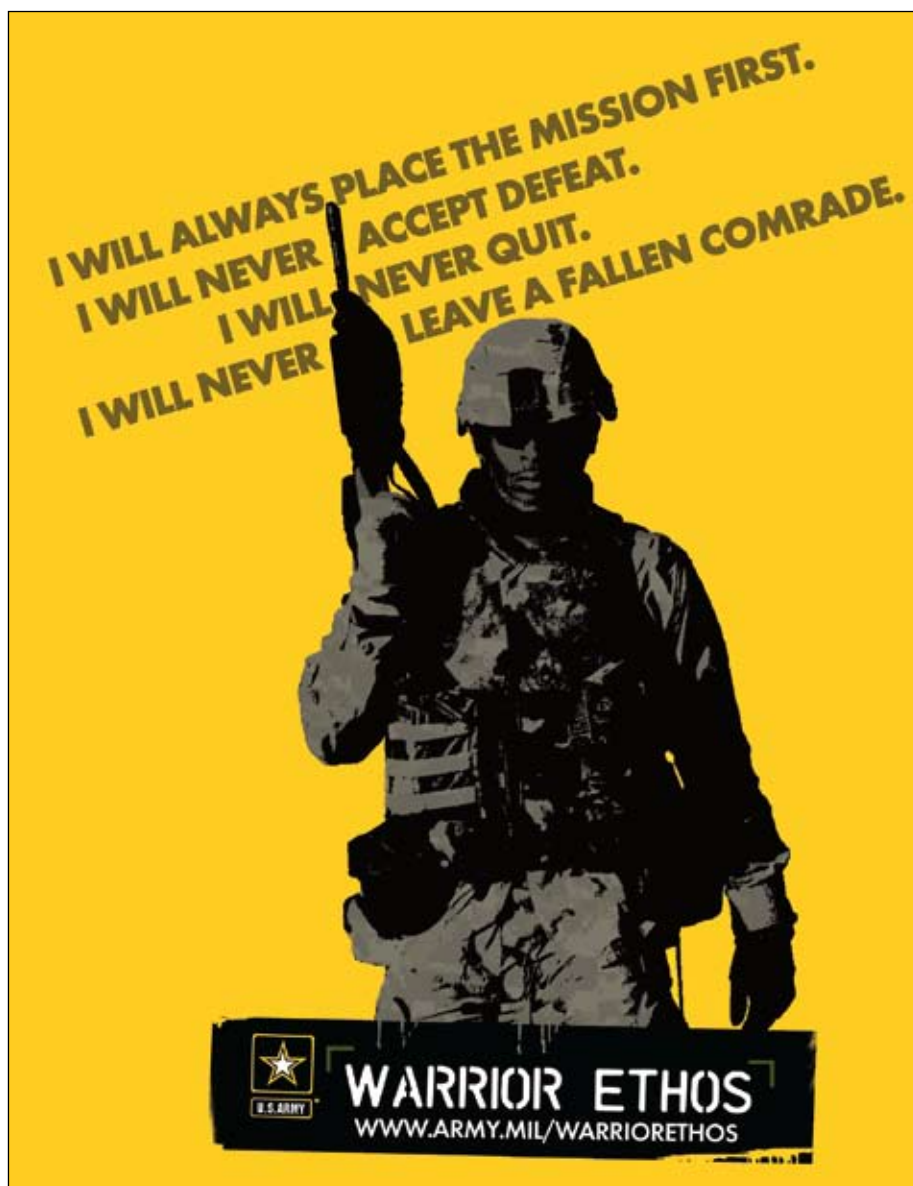
The second mission is to create and integrate knowledge about our ethic. This will entail creating a synergistic relationship among the Army, our joint and international partners, and academia to direct and analyze the latest and most advanced research on topics related to the professional military ethic—from fields including ethics, law, behavioral science, leadership, philosophy, and social science. Soon, for example, we will begin to publish a series of monographs under the joint auspices of ACPME at West Point and the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute. Using this knowledge, we can enhance strategic and critical thinking, promote dialogue at all levels and across all components, and capture the Army's imagination on this vital subject.

The third mission is to accelerate moral-ethical development in individuals, units, and Army institutions in order to transform attitudes and to remain sensitive to the nuances of operating among the people in an era of persistent conflict. We need to develop leaders

at all levels who can recognize a morally ambiguous situation, apply appropriate decisionmaking skills, and demonstrate the confidence and courage to do what is right. Army culture and institutions are not keeping pace with what is happening on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to examine our professional military ethic and respond to the issues arising from this more complex environment. A key task will be to support the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command in requirements analysis, doctrine, programs of instruction, and the development of written texts—as well as developing and promulgating training and educational products to the operating force.

While West Point as the Center of Excellence will serve as the Army's lead, this effort must be Army-wide. Ultimately, this is not

about the study of ethics or any other related process; it is about the core of our Army profession. Our Service has much to be proud of, but the challenges ahead of us are great. We have to study and think about our professional military ethic and our culture in light of today's circumstances. At the same time, we need to be the guardians of the legacy born in 1775 with our Army's founding and passed from generation to generation. The citizens of the United States expect nothing less than unwavering integrity, honor, courage, competence, and professionalism from their Army. The Army Center of Excellence for the Professional Military Ethic is a demonstration of our commitment to maintaining and strengthening the moral fabric of our profession. But it is only a beginning. Taking the next step is up to all of us. **JFQ**



U.S. Army